

COLONIAL LEGACY, COMMUNIST NOSTALGIA AND FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE 29-03-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Colonial Legacy, Communist Nostalgia and Failure of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Thuthuzelekani Ngcingwana				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Only a work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright. The author is not an employee of the United States Government. Consequently, this document may be protected by copyright.					
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15. SUBJECT TERMS Early Civilization, Slavery, Post-Colonial Leaders, Governance, African Socialism					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 34	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**COLONIAL LEGACY, COMMUNIST NOSTALGIA AND FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Thuthuzelekani Ngcingwana

TITLE: Colonial Legacy, Communist Nostalgia and Failure of Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 29 March 2011 **WORD COUNT:** 7,420 **PAGES:** 34

KEY TERMS: Early Civilization, Slavery, Post-Colonial Leaders, Governance, African Socialism

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper will discuss the cultural background of Sub-Saharan Africans in general, the impact of Colonialism and Communism on Sub-Saharan African politics, leadership and culture. The focus will be on how colonialism reinforced some of the negative cultural stereotypes on Sub-Saharan Africans and post-colonial Africa. The paper will also discuss what enticed Sub-Saharan Africans to Communism and why are Sub-Saharan African leaders still obsessed with Communism when it has failed globally? Challenges of post cold war and strategies for sustained democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa will also be discussed.

COLONIAL LEGACY COMMUNIST NOSTALGIA AND FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

On 06 March 1957, Ghana became independent under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah who referred to it as the turning point on the continent as he had already preached and championed the gospel of African liberation.¹ Indeed this was followed by the independence of Guinea in 1958 and subsequently the rest of Africa was liberated between 1960 and 1980 (except South Africa which only attained freedom in 1994).² The fall of colonialism and the dawn of African rule brought hopes of freedom, liberty, human dignity, social stability and democratic governance to Africans after over four centuries of foreign subjugation. Unfortunately, for poor Africans, their utopian ideals were short lived as African dictators were not comfortable with the principles of democracy. They endeavored to substitute democracy with unjust methods of governance destroying the economy, infrastructure and creating severe poverty, chaos and unbelievable ill treatment of their own nations.

Throughout the last half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century Sub-Saharan Africa faced political turmoil after turmoil. The political crisis in this region ranges from, but not limited to, suspension of constitutions, election rigging or annulment, military coups, civil wars, etc. There is a limited progress towards democracy as evident in the number of elections taking place but a lot still remains to be done to consider Sub-Saharan African countries truly democratic. Of particular concern is the fact that efforts to remedy the situation, in countries that are politically unstable, are undermined by eruptions of political instability in countries that seemed stable. In a recent article to the City Press entitled „Death of Democracy“ Kgosi Lethlogile wrote,

*“There is something wrong with us Africans it was Somali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe (the list is endless) and now it is Ivory Coast. I hope this is the last time I hear of people being reluctant to surrender power after they have fairly lost elections.”*³ Lethlogile is expressing a frustration shared by most Africans who have been victims of foreign oppression which was later replaced by post colonial local tyrants. According to the 2010 Failed State Index by Foreign Policy Website, 46.66% of the failed states in the world are from Sub-Saharan Africa, the top five countries in this index are from the same region and the rest of the region lies between borderline and critical state failure.⁴

Efforts by African leaders and the international community to instill political sanity in Sub-Saharan African seem to be in vain. It is in light of this background that this paper will explore the problems of Sub-Saharan Africa in order to present recommendations on measures to redress this situation. This would be achieved by discussing the pre-colonial cultural background of Sub-Saharan Africans in general, the impact of Colonialism and Communism on Sub-Saharan African politics, leadership and culture. The focus will be on how colonialism has reinforced the negative cultural stereotypes on Sub-Saharan Africans. It will also explore the factors that enticed Sub-Saharan Africans to Communism and why Sub-Saharan Africa is still obsessed with Communism when it has failed globally? Challenges of post cold war and strategies for sustained democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa will also be discussed.

The Early Civilization Era

To understand the cultural background of Sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to understand the factors that influence the early organization of Sub-Saharan societies. The early civilization of mankind took place around North Africa and Eurasia with the

first civilized kingdoms being the Kingdom of Mesopotamia and Egypt around 3100 BC. These two kingdoms were followed by the Kingdoms of Indus: 2500 BC, the Aegean: 2000 BC, China: 1600 BC, America: 1200 BC, the Phoenicians: from 1000 BC and regional civilizations (Greece, Rome, China, Americas and Islam): AD 400 - 1500.⁵ The region of Sub-Saharan Africa was left out from this development due to geographical factors, such as the climatic changes that took place around 3000 BC causing the desertification of the Sahara leading to the partial isolation of the region from North Africa and Eurasia.⁶ The region was further isolated from the rest of the world by large oceans that surround it. But the most crucial factor that retarded the formation of large civilized societies was the hostile environment within the region itself. According to John Iliffe, "Africa"s rocks, poor soil, fickle rainfall, abundant insects and unique prevalence of disease composed an environment hostile to agricultural communities".⁷ Pre-colonial Africa was therefore under populated until the late twentieth century and the early societies were nomadic in search of food and arable land for grazing. These societies were focused on adapting to the environment rather than changing it. Fears of extinction as a result of hostile environment led to the focus on fertility which gave birth to polygyny.⁸ This adaptive character of early Sub-Saharan Africans may give some light to understanding the tolerant nature of the people of this region to abuse as has been the case throughout its history as exemplified by their endurance of slavery and other abusive systems.

Another factor that contributed to the delay of civilization in the region were the vast sums of land that were unoccupied which encouraged ambitious or discontent members of the communities to migrate to other areas in the region and establish new

settlements. It is the combination of all these factors that led to Sub-Saharan Africa's failure to keep up with early civilization. The first recorded contact with the outside world was around AD 1000 between East Africans and the nations of Southern Arabia and the Red Sea.⁹ There is also evidence of early trade between West Africa and North Africa around the 7th century.¹⁰ These interactions resulted in the commercial development of these areas and introduced the influence of Islam in Africa culture as these nations' culture was superior to that of Sub Saharan Africa. By the eleventh and early twelfth centuries about eight of the coastal settlements built stone mosques with the most prominent one being the foundation of the Muslim dynasty at Kilwa on the South Tanzanian coast.¹¹ Arabic trade also expanded south inland, to Great Zimbabwe through Mozambique.

Atlantic Slavery Trade

The next notable contact with the outside world was the arrival of the Portuguese which marked the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade which began in A.D.1441 and lasted for more than three centuries. The slave trade resulted in approximately 11 million West African people being sold by their own leaders to Europeans who exported them across the Atlantic.¹² This wave of human trafficking severely interrupted the demographic growth in West Africa for over three centuries resulting in another halt in the region's development. The exact severity of the slave trade on the West African demographic cannot be quantified due to lack of recorded data relating to those that died during capture, or while waiting to be transported across the Atlantic Ocean to their destinations of bondage.¹³ According to John Iliffe "the slave trade grew faster than international trade as a whole and it was mainly concentrated in West Africa but it had no impact in changing the structure of West African industry or improve its transport

system even after three hundred years of trade with Europe".¹⁴ He continues to explain that even though the main economic activity in those days was agriculture, there was very limited participation from West African communities in agriculture and their only form of agricultural export was to supply food to feed the slaves while en route to their place of enslavement.¹⁵ This again shows a similar reaction as exhibited by early Sub-Saharan African society of being adaptive to the harsh environment rather than endeavoring to change it. The African slave traders neglected all other forms of economy and focused on this immoral activity without even realizing that they were robbing their communities of a productive sector of the population.

The slave trade severely affected the social life in Sub-Saharan Africa in many ways, for example ownership of slaves in highly commercialized coastal societies became the criterion for full citizenship and in the Gold Coast it is estimated that, around 1770 so-called "free men" owned at least one or two slaves.¹⁶ According to Iliffe, "the ethos of slave societies was brutally inegalitarian and acquisitive," it upheld the belief that wealth can only be accumulated by exploiting others and the desperation to acquire this wealth drove African slave owners to appeal to supernatural powers such as witchcraft and gods to assist them in accumulating more slaves.¹⁷ He further writes that previous cultures of hardship in Africa made slavery possible and survivable, for instance the polygamous marriages catered for orphans and surplus women and the kinship network structure was also strengthened by slavery.¹⁸ Observations by Iliffe dispel the notion that Africans are by nature non exploitative, that they are generally modest and do not seek individual successes but are rather committed to the betterment of the entire society. Most post-colonial leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa were

and are proponents of this idea in trying to justify communism and African Socialism and blamed any form of individual accumulation of wealth as a capitalist reactionary tendency.

Colonial Era

Concurrent with slavery was the creation of small European settlements on the African coast for various reasons such as the Cape Town Refreshment Station established by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652.¹⁹ Another reason for these settlements was to find a secure source of slaves. An example of this is the Saint Louis settlement, a French population that settled in Senegal around 1659.²⁰ The last reason for these settlements was mainly commodity trade, like the 1482 Portuguese settlement in the Gold Coast (Ghana) which was entirely devoted to the commercial endeavor for gold trade.²¹ It is clear from these reasons and early development of the coastal towns that the interest of the early European settlers was economic and not intended for permanent occupation. But whatever the reasons were for these settlements, they grew with time and spread more to the interior resulting in conflict with the local African people. The discovery of resources such as gold, diamonds and rubber encouraged the influx of Europeans to Sub-Saharan Africa culminating in the colonization of not only the region but also the rest of the continent.

By 1914, Africa was divided amongst a number of European powers who ruled and dominated over Africans. The European powers were mainly Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. These powers casually partitioned Africa by drawing borders on a piece of paper to mark their claims.²² The advent of colonialism was the third unfortunate epoch in the history of Sub-Saharan Africa as it brought a new form of oppression and humiliation to Africans. Colonial powers or their representatives

robbed Africa of its rich mineral resources with beneficiation taking place in the country of the colonial power with zero benefits for the colonized subjects. Colonial powers also subjected Africans to repressive colonial rule that was often motivated by racial discrimination and prejudice. Colonial borders were unilaterally drawn by colonial powers with utter disregard for the interests of Africans and, in the process, communities that once belonged together were displaced. Africans, who were aggrieved by this injustice, fought bravely and bitterly against colonialism but were overpowered by the superior weaponry that their European aggressors possessed.²³

On the main, the early colonial governments were only holding operations in anticipation of future benefits from the colonies and each colonial power had its own policies to administer their colonies.²⁴ The French had the highest number of colonies. Countries that were under French rule were Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, Ivory Coast, Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Gabon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Somali, Comoros and Reunion Islands.²⁵ French colonial policy was based on the belief that the French culture was superior to the cultures of their colonial subjects and therefore adopted an assimilation policy. The assimilation policy meant that individuals who were coerced into accepting French culture and religion would receive all the rights enjoyed by a metropolitan Frenchman. In practice this principle was not always observed by the colonial masters even though the colonial subjects complied with its requirements.²⁶ In essence the French colonial policy of assimilation was as humiliating as it was psychologically and socially degrading. To convince people to believe that they were inferior and should therefore denounce their own heritage and sheepishly adopt French culture in order to be recognized as equals

was degrading. But as the French kept shifting goal posts, Africans were disappointed as their colonial master could not bring themselves to accept Africans as equals.

The British government was France's biggest colonial competitor. However, Britain applied a different system of colonial rule to govern its colonies. The British colonies included British Somaliland, Botswana, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. The colonial rule was exercised by the employment of chartered companies such as the Imperial British East African Company or British governors/commissioners with a limited staff to preside over the colonies. This necessitated the utilization of local chiefs who were obedient to the British rule to collaborate in the unjust subjugation of their own people. Those chiefs who were not obedient were replaced by appointing those who were willing to collaborate and this created tensions in those areas.²⁷ It is important to note that the local chiefs were only involved in supervised tribal rule which was a very elementary level of governance. The British, like their French counterparts, believed in the inferiority of Africans as a race and consequently did not entrust them with more responsibility. In some cases the British governors tried to increase the white populace in order to dominate the indigenous Africans. For instance Governor Charles Eliot to Kenya (1901 – 04) said, “we should face the undoubted reality that the white mates black in a very few moves... There can be no doubt that the Masai and many other tribes must go under. It is a prospect which I view with equanimity and a clear conscience...”²⁸ This practice was not limited to Kenya but was also prevalent in South Africa during the formation of the Union of 1910 where

Blacks were excluded thereby reinforcing the European notion that regarded Africans as an inferior race that had to be dominated.

The other colonial power is Belgium which, by 1914, controlled Congo (now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo). After World War II Belgium added other colonies i.e. Rwanda and Burundi.²⁹ Belgian rule evolved from establishing an independent Congo empire which was monopolized by the Belgian's Leopold from 1887 to 1908 to indirect rule in 1909. Leopold ensured that his officials controlled all the available resources such as ivory and wild rubber and later his administrative system was condemned internationally for its brutalities in the acquisition of minerals.³⁰ Leopold's policy for Congo is a classical example of the repressive rule by Europeans over Africans and clearly illustrates how African countries were dispossessed of their rich mineral resources whilst marginalized from participating in economic activities and governance. After the death of Leopold, Belgian authorities revised their system of indirect rule in Congo adopting a more direct and paternalistic system which gave the inhabitants of Congo very little participation in directing their own affairs.³¹ The new Belgian policy for Congo was comprehensive and was designed to lead to the social and economic betterment of their colony. One of its cornerstones was an education policy that was designed to train Congolese for subordinate positions within the colony. It should, however, be noted that the Belgians had a different system for Rwanda and Burundi which was based on indirect rule by Tutsi aristocracy.³² In this context the Belgians manipulated the physical differences between the Tutsis, who were in the minority, and the Hutu majority to use the former to exploit the latter creating a conflict that has endured for decades.

The last colonial power discussed in this paper is Portugal. Portugal colonized Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea (now known as Equatorial Guinea). The Portuguese adopted an assimilation policy that rewarded those amongst their subjects who accepted Portuguese culture and could speak their language, with equal rights.³³ However, this policy never realized its objective due to resource constraints on Portugal. As a result only 36,000 Africans were assimilated out of a total population of 10.5 million found in all Portuguese colonies in Africa. Another reason for its limited impact derived from the fact that Portuguese citizens were used to administering Africans up to lower levels hence their rule was dominated by abuses such as forced labor.³⁴

Though Germany, Spain and Italy were other European colonial powers of note they will, however, not be discussed in this paper. It is worth mentioning that, like slavery, colonial rule had a significant impact, mostly negative, in the overall life of Africans in Sub-Saharan Africa. The political repercussion of colonialism was the partitioning of Africa in which the continent was divided on a piece of paper amongst colonial powers. Colonial boundaries were drawn with utter disregard of the historic, ethnical, or political boundaries that existed pre-colonial times. The colonial boundaries have since become one source of conflict in Africa until this present day. Amongst these conflicts one can cite the approximately 30 year old tug-of-war between Ethiopia and Eritrea that has not abated despite the attainment of independence by the latter in 1993.³⁵ The other one is the brewing border dispute between Uganda and DRC around Lake Albert which has been exasperated by the discovery of oil.³⁶ Last but not least the simmering conflict between the people of Uganda and Kenya from the small Migingo Island in Lake Victoria that is further compounded by the local fishermen's claim to the

effect that the island belongs to both countries.³⁷ The list of these conflicts is endless and so far some of the boundary disputes have been resolved by the International Law Court which basically relies on the application of the principle of “*uti possidetis, ita possideatis*,” or “*as you possess, so may you possess*.” This means that whatever was owned by colonial powers as part of that colony before independence remains with that colony post independence.³⁸ Though this has been successful in situations, such as the Burkina Faso border, it has not managed to adequately resolve other issues where the stakes are higher and the situation is more complex. An example of this is the current Sudan crisis that has led to the referendum to decide on the secession of South Sudan from the Islamic Republic of Sudan.

Another political repercussion of colonialism was the destruction of the existing African political systems and the confinement of Africans to junior positions that were only created or allowed to exist to enhance colonial control. These clearly demonstrated that colonial powers were not ready to give power to Africans as articulated by Philip Mitchell, the governor of Uganda, who in 1939 said, “We have an almost unlimited time to make our disposition.”³⁹ Mitchell made this statement to justify the reluctance of the colonial powers in preparing or allowing Africans to participate in their own governance. The other negative impact of colonial powers was their malicious use of the tribal differences that existed between Africans to exacerbate conflict amongst the indigenous population that had hitherto managed to coexist peacefully. This was deliberately orchestrated to prevent them from uniting against the colonialists. This policy was referred to as “divide and rule” and had far reaching consequences for Africa whose deep rooted negative impacts are still evident till this day. The divide and rule and,

indirect policies continue to fuel current conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi in the present Rwanda and Burundi and were the chief source of the Rwanda genocide in the early 1990s. The issue of using ethnic differences was first started by the Germans who brought their racist tendencies from Europe and convinced the Tutsi, who were taller and had a lighter skin with a sharper nose than Hutu, that they were a superior ethnic group than their Hutu compatriots. When the Belgians later arrived they reinforced these stereotypes and maliciously magnified these differences to an extent that when the physical differences were difficult to identify due to inter-ethnic marriages they used the number of cattle an individual possessed to highlight the differences between the two groups. Those who had ten or more cattle were regarded as Tutsi and those with less than ten cattle as Hutus. The ethnic differences were even recorded in the identity documents that Africans were forced to carry with them all the time.⁴⁰

Colonialism had an adverse economic impact for Africans as colonial powers or their representatives diligently and ruthlessly exploited and monopolized the most fertile land and rich mineral resources at the expense of the indigenous population that was pushed to inerrable and less resourceful areas. For instance, in Congo Leopold secretly grabbed resources for his government and multi-national companies, while Africans in the area were made victims of forced labor.⁴¹ Africans mostly participated in the subsistence farming and others were left with no alternative but to sell their labor to colonial masters. Colonial powers and multi-national companies amassed resources for themselves and restricted-cum-prohibited Africans from participating fairly and equally in the economy. In some cases these practices were even legislated as in the case of Leopold's laws in Congo and the Apartheid legislation in South Africa. The legacy of

colonialism on the African economy is such that the majority of Africans are very poor and a few are rich but still the greater wealth is owned by multinational companies.

On a positive note colonialism brought a considerable amount of selective development to African economies particularly in relation to infrastructure even though the major goal was to benefit the colonial powers. A few Africans managed to receive education as schools were built in Africa to allow for more access to education for Sub-Saharan Africans. Missionaries travelled the length and breadth of the continent to convert Africans to Christianity thus introducing new values to the people of the region which, to a degree, had a very positive impact as it managed to convert a highly superstitious society. This happened during an era where it was common for African slave owners to appeal to supernatural powers such as witchcraft, and gods to assist them in accumulating more slaves or wealth and sometimes this involved human sacrifices.⁴² The labor migration to the cities built by colonial powers encouraged some form of cultural integration of Africans who were originally highly segregated into small tribes.

Both the integration of African societies in the cities, and the increased number of educated people, led to the formation liberation movements in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴³ In this regard, an educated group of Africans started to mobilize the populations of Sub-Saharan Africa calling for national liberation as early as the beginning of the twentieth century and these efforts intensified in the 1950"s. The threat of the cold war forced colonial powers to weigh the benefits of fighting to retain the colonies and some realized that cost considerations left them with no alternative but to cut down on the number of colonies. It must, however, be mentioned that when this reality dawned most, if not all,

colonial powers were caught off guard and therefore left without, if at all, adequately preparing their colonial subjects for self-government. The first Sub-Saharan African country to attain independence was Ghana in 1957. This marked the beginning of the liberation of Africa. Colonial powers, confronted by this reality desperately concocted crash courses in self-government and constitutions were borrowed from other countries to manage the African take over.⁴⁴ The advent of independence introduced a new era in the Sub Saharan African history and politics.

Post Colonial Leadership

The advent of independence in Sub-Saharan Africa was received with great enthusiasm by the people of the region as it brought hope of total liberation and a better life in line with the promises made by nationalist leaders. But this dream was short-lived as it was overtaken by political and economic turmoil that swept the region like a recurring tsunami. Barely eight years after Ghana had attained its independence it experienced its first military coup on 24 February 1966. Subsequent to that the country constantly swung back and forth between civilian and military rule until January 7, 1993 when sanity prevailed as it eventually returned to full democratic rule.⁴⁵ Likewise Nigeria attained its independence on 01 October 1960 and experienced its first military coup in January 1966. Between January 1966 and June 1998 Nigeria had six military coups. Over this period there had only been one civilian rule for a period of two years.⁴⁶ Over and above Ghana and Nigeria another country in West Africa was Burkina Faso which attained its independence in 1960. As though to keep up with its neighbors, Ghana and Nigeria, Burkina Faso experienced its first military coup in 1966 which was followed by a series of military dictatorships until 1987. In the majority of instances the military coups were violent and often characterized by gross violation of human rights. For example,

the January 1966 Nigerian military coup assassinations of the federal prime minister and the premiers of the northern and western regions followed. These were further punctuated by the ethnic massacre that culminated in the death of many Igbo people.⁴⁷

The countries mentioned above are not the only countries in sub-Saharan Africa that were plagued by military coups. Though the list is too long to exhaust one needs to mention countries like Congo-Kinshasa (DRC) 1960 where General Mobutu seized power by force, Togo in 1963, Congo- Brazzaville in 1963, Dahomey (Benin) in 1963, Gabon in 1964, Burundi in 1965, Central African Republic in 1966, Sierra Leone in 1967, Mali in 1968, Sudan in 1969, Somalia in 1969 and Uganda in 1971.⁴⁸ It is also worth mentioning that some of these countries experienced a series of coups as the population continued to suffer the dire consequences. It is important to note that military coups were just one symptom that reflected failure on the part of most post-colonial rulers to rise to the demanding and complicated challenges of self-governance and democracy. Apart from coups this failure often led to civil wars and a vicious circle dominated by brutal acts of human rights violation, mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Africans by Africans and, generally, gross abuse of power. The Rwandan genocide and Sierra Lone and Sudan civil wars continue to hang like an albatross in Africa's post-colonial history. In Rwanda alone, 800, 000 people were killed in one week in April 1994 in an ethnic cleansing of Tutsi that was orchestrated by 200, 000 Hutus.⁴⁹

In essence, military coups and civil wars became synonymous with post-colonial Africa. Inherent in both is underdevelopment, the killing and displacement of children and women. The other sore point in Africa's post-colonial era is the refusal of African leaders to relinquish power and, sadly, this persists to today's current African

challenges. It is certain that the history of the region has had a significant influence on its current problems but primary to its success is its leadership. Leadership has been the core in the problems of post colonial Africa and it has evolved over three distinguishable generations.

The next paragraphs are dedicated at critically analyzing the three categories of post colonial leadership as it has been the core to post colonial problems of the region and remains critical for its success. The first generation of post colonial leaders was those who attained leadership through the struggle with the colonial rulers and whose popularity resulted in them winning the first elections in their respective countries. These leaders came from a limited group of elites in their societies with no experience in governance but were determined to break all chains of colonialism and lead their countries in a new era of independence. It must be acknowledged that these leaders did well to change the flag, national anthem and, in some instances, the name of the country. They however struggled to overcome the challenges that democracy and self-governance presented. Most attempted to totally discard of all vestiges of colonial rule without objectively assessing what was worth discarding and what was worth retaining. This total rejection of colonial structures and instruments of governance often proved to be as short-sighted as it was suicidal on the part of new post-colonial governments.

This situation was compounded by the fact that during the colonial era colonialists' perception which maintained that Africans were inferior ensured that Africans did not get adequate exposure to the colonial way of doing things. Since the colonialists were of the view that Africans were not intelligent enough to come to grips with the sophisticated institutions of the west there was general reluctance to prepare

Africans for governance and management of their institutions. That the western powers also undermined and interfered with the tribal ruling system resulted in those institutions becoming dormant and, by extension, not being in a position to develop and adapt with the times. There was consequently a wide vacuum in the government structure in post colonial era. Secondly, when the reality of decolonization had dawned, often unexpectedly, constitutions were concocted overnight to try and manage the transition and as a result they proved to be a problem for the early African leaders. As can be expected adapting to new responsibilities led many post colonial leaders being confronted with problems soon after their ascendance to power as they struggled to govern with the weak and, often, inappropriate structures that had been left by colonialists. When they felt threatened by growing dissent from the public in relation to poor governance and their own failure to resist to the temptation of remaining in power for longer than was permitted by the constitution most resorted to desperate measures of clinging to power. The first thing they did was to try and alter the constitution to suit their needs i.e. prolong their power indefinitely. For an example, as soon as Ghana's first post-colonial indigenous leader, Kwame Nkrumah, was challenged and criticized shortly after Ghana's independence his reaction was heavy handed in the sense that he evoked the draconian Preventive Detention Act (1958), (which provided for detention without trial for up to 5 years" later extended to 10 years) and, in 1964, a constitutional referendum changed the country to a one-party state.⁵⁰

The next solution that African leaders adopted was to turn to socialism or communism. In trying to convince their populations to adopt communism or socialism they argued that Africans were in their nature socialistic and that their way of life was

originally socialistic or communal before it was disturbed by the arrival of Europeans. Now this is a fallacy as earlier indicated above that African leaders did partake actively in the slave trade. These leaders took their followers and sold them to Europeans to satisfy their personal greed. Notwithstanding this fact some leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa argued that western democracy was not right for Africans and that African traditions requires resolution of political issues through consensus building.⁵¹ According to Herman J. Cohen, *"Post Colonial African one party state became the political system of choice and it was all encompassing, including all citizen as party members from birth, civil society the singular important power that constitutes the back-bone of democracy was co-opted into the single party structure which."*⁵² This argument implied that the post-colonial African political system was informed by communist or socialist ideals which were also extended to the economy. The state took control of the economy after five years of independence most large plantations, banks, insurance companies, telecommunication firms, agro-industries, mines, and factories were nationalized with the owners who were mostly foreign being compensated.⁵³ In reality the shallowness of these ideals was soon exposed. This happened when owing to the inefficiency of Sub-Saharan African government to govern the country and manage these economies soon created internal tensions as only government loyalists and family members were benefiting from the country's wealth. These tensions resulted in coup d'états, sometimes bloody, which, in turn, brought to the fore the next generation of leaders who were military tyrants.

As already indicated in the preceding pages that Sub-Saharan Africa was swept by a wave of military coups for over a prolonged period of time and these coups were

no doubt a legacy of the past. Post colonial Sub Saharan African armies were inherited from the colonial government and they were initially formed to repress rebellion and protect colonialist interest. The recruitment in the colonial army was mostly based on exclusion of certain tribe in favors of those loyal to the colonialist which meant that they were not representative of their population demographics.⁵⁴ That post-colonial rulers inherited such armies suggested that such armies were, from the very onset, a recipe for disaster especially bearing in mind that they were used to suppress the same revolutions that they were now expected to defend. Nonetheless tensions between political leaders and the military heightened as the inexperienced government failed to run the affairs of the country and eventually the military leaders took over the government through coup d'état sighting various reasons. Some of the reasons cited by military leaders to take over the government ranged from accusing the civilian government of corruption, tribalism ethnicity, inefficiency, etc. Unfortunately, this era of military leaders was also an era that was characterized by, at times, even worse inefficiency, clinging to power, corruption, tribalism, nepotism, money laundering, repressive laws, gross violation of human rights, etc, than the civilian governments that they had ousted with promises of better governance, democracy and prosperity.⁵⁵

It would be a drastic oversight to fail to acknowledge and mention the existence of military leaders who were an exception to the rule. Such military leaders did live up to the promise of bringing economic, social and political stability in their countries.

Amongst military leaders with such credentials one should mention Jerry J. Rawlings from Ghana, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Ughanda and Pual Kagame of Rwanda. These leaders took power through arms and later stabilized their countries and laid grounds for

democracy. Ghana has been the most successful as Jerry Rawlings has set a good example for his nation by adhering to the principles of democracy in stepping down from office when his term had expired as dictated by the constitution. It is unfortunate that Museveni and Kagame are now finding the trappings of power so irresistible that both have clung to power for between the two of them almost forty years. Much as they have permitted elections to take place the jury is out as to the credibility of those elections especially given their use of state power to suppress internal (within their own organizations) and external (other political formations in their own countries) competition and commit state resources to electioneer. Clearly such leaders are just a minute fraction of the gross military leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa the majority of whom has failed the people of the region. The era of military rule turned out to be yet another dark period in the history of the region as the overwhelming majority of these militarists aggravated rather than solved the problems they had claimed they intended solving. By the time most were ousted their countries were left worse off in terms of tax evasion, money laundering, illegally amassing wealth for themselves and those close to them, corruption, repressive laws, gross violation of human rights, tribalism, ethnicity and, generally, embracing all forms of bad governance.⁵⁶

The third generation of post colonial leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa appeared in the 1990s and could be subdivided into two groups. The first is constituted by educated Africans who espoused democratic principles and the other being the old dictators.⁵⁷ But both these components of third generation leaders include a sizeable number of individuals who are still trapped in the communism hangover or nostalgia. This communism hangover has been perpetuated by the cold war which has helped it to

endure the era of the military bullies. The decolonization of the region happened concurrently with the cold war and as super powers were battling for dominance of the world Sub-Saharan Africa, like all former colonies, became the helpless grass in a fight of two elephants. The former Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China Governments pumped a lot of money and arsenal to Sub-Saharan governments and liberation movements that espoused the ideals of communism or socialism. The rhetoric of those days was anti colonialism, anti capitalism, anti imperialism with western democracy being referred to as anarchy. The military juntas and dictators were well served by the communist/socialist ideals and rhetoric as they encouraged centralization of power and limited openness in fear of the then perceived western infiltration that might create anarchy.

As already intimated this rhetoric still makes sense amongst a sizeable number of the third generation (current) leaders. The irony is that even those leaders that espouse democratic values and free market economies still find themselves entrapped, in the communist/socialist rhetoric. For instance, some amongst this generation of political leaders tell their constituencies that business is exploiting them and that they should strengthen their trade unions to fight diligently against exploitation from the employers. This happens despite the reality of the government being the major employer, a situation that sets government in constant conflict with its employees courtesy of the rhetoric from some government leaders about the need to strengthen the bargaining power of trade unions. The obvious consequence of this is that these governments find themselves preoccupied with attempts that are geared at resolving labor disputes as angry workers go on rampage destroying the “capitalist infrastructure”

that is already poor because they do not regard themselves as having a stake in its ownership. The message sent by political leaders as interpreted by the population is that the infrastructure does not belong to the nation but to the rich even though most of it is maintained at tax payer expense. The other problem of the third generation leaders is that in an effort to evade accountability they condemn their own institutions of accountability as capitalist agents and counter revolutionary, which again encourages a culture of non accountability. The other card up the sleeves of the third generation Sub Saharan African leaders to gain popularity is the rhetoric of wealth redistribution to the poor which in realty means enrichment of party loyalists and family members.

Remedial Strategies

Taking into cognizance of the above discussion it is clear that Sub-Saharan Africa has serious problems which have evolved over a long period of time. At the core of addressing all these problems is leadership. Unavoidably the most important consideration for African leaders will be to try and master the art of strategic communication. In this regard, the message they put across should be crafted to reach the entire citizenry in its diversity and should take into cognizance the reality of governance in a dynamic and fast-changing world. People the world over are demanding rights in their entirety i.e. right to regularly choose who governs them, right to express themselves freely, right to associate with whoever suits their fancy, right for freedom of expression, right for freedom of association, right to live in a country that encourages a free market economy, etc. The people of the region are mostly uneducated and the governments do not have the capacity to educate large numbers of people. It is for this reason that political leaders should learn to be teachers of their populations. The political message in public platforms should be to encourage people to

embrace the rule of law, democratic principle and values. Leaders should avoid messages that are directed at electioneering at the compromise of democratic principle and the rule of law.

The other thing that Sub-Saharan leaders need to do is to establish credible governance institutions to promote order and security so as to attract investment in their countries. They should deem themselves to be the custodian of these institutions and should there defend them diligently. Thirdly leaders should work towards transforming their economies by minimizing the participation of government while ensuring a broader participation of their public. They should endeavor at all times to promote the relationship between the investor and the population and this again will mainly be achieved by the right political rhetoric and progressive policies. In most countries of the region the wealth is owned by a small significant number of local people and multinational companies and this is a potential source of future conflict. In countries where redistribution has taken or taking place it usually focused on few individuals. This also creates resentment and a source of future conflict yet the more people own the less number of them will be enticed to destroy the infrastructure in case of any dispute.

The sum total of the above suggested remedies will lead to the social transformation of the region. The more people have access to and participate in the economy the less poverty and hence the more avenues for social transformation will prevail. Good governance systems and positive leadership will promote democratic principles, values and rule of law amongst the population and so is stable economy.

Conclusion

Throughout its history, Sub-Saharan African development has been retarded by epoch after epoch of misfortune. From the early civilization era which saw the region

being left out from civilization due to geographic factors to the subsequent eras of slavery, colonial and post colonial. Some negative impacts of these eras were carried forward to the present generation and are part of the major causes of today's problems. Though the early civilization and slavery have had impacts in the backwardness of the region such as the developmental stagnation for more than three centuries during slave trade, they are not significant influences on today's problems. Colonialist legacy and communist nostalgia have had the most significant contribution to the failure of democracy in the region. As earlier pointed out they have been the source of political crisis in the region, which has manifested its self by but not limited to suspension of constitutions, election rigging or annulment military coups, civil wars, bad governance, etc. The situation has been a frustration to the people of the region and the international community at large the region continues to lead the world in failing states.

Of course one has to acknowledge that there has been some change in Africa. The Africa of today has a number of former Heads of State and/or Government than at any time in its history. It is heartening to note that some of these leaders voluntarily handed over power before or when their country's constitutions so demanded. Some amongst them are availing their skills as eminent persons to the African Union (AU) to help resolve some of the outstanding conflicts on the African continent. The AU itself suspends any country where the government is ousted by undemocratic means. There are also a growing number of current African leaders that is unapologetically embracing the free market system/ capitalism. Ghana has again led the way by, on more than one occasion, peacefully transferring power from a loosing incumbent to another party. The cherry on top is that Liberia has Africa's first female Head of State and/or Government.

Conversely one needs to mention that many elections in Africa leave a lot to be desired. There is indeed a tendency by those in power to want to hold on to power until kingdom come. This is often at the expense of suppressing democracy within their own parties so that nobody challenges them and arresting political competitors under trumped up charges. There have also been instances where the incumbent refused to relinquish power, a situation which has led into the imposition of the unworkable solution of a government of national unity.

On a positive note, 2011 is proving to be a year where the scourge of dictatorship in Africa and beyond will get an overdue burial. The first quarter of the year has witnessed social networks" driven revolutions that look destined to usher democracy the world over. The message has been basic but firm. As currently witnessed the peoples in a number of countries in mostly North Africa and the Middle East are rising against long-serving autocratic rulers and demanding the aforementioned rights so that they can be architects of their own lives and destiny. The leaders of Sub-Saharan Africa should learn a lesson from this and fast track the processes of democracies and of assistance to them are the remedial strategies suggested above.

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